

## don't stop believin' by hoars

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**Summary:**

In a world inspired by Dungeons and Dragons, the party comes to terms with their classes.

## 1. Ranger Lucas

Dr. Sinclair was talented with alchemy. He studied how plants and metals talked, and a two degrees later, a pharmaceutical company head hunted him. He had low level magic stats, but it was enough to make a drug more potent.

Mrs. Not-Quite-Sinclair met Dr. Sinclair in a research study when he was in graduate school. The study was researching hedgewitches and how their power was different from a traditional alchemist. The difference was still a mystery, but Mrs. Not-Quite-Sinclair agreed to see PhD student Sinclair outside of the study.

The rest was kind of history.

“The classes aren't black and white,” Mrs. Sinclair explained when her son asked. She kept her voice quiet, like she was passing on a family secret. “Sometimes, you excel in one subcategory of a class, but you fail in another subcategory. I have more in common with the Druids, but I don't have their affinity for animals. Understand?”

Lucas thought he might.

He liked the woods, more or less.

As a little kid, trampling through the woods like they were another playmate was common enough. He helped build Castle Byers. Being outside was part of being a kid in Hawkins.

The sign he should have recognized, the mark of a class selecting him, should have been the splinter he got that day. Lucas couldn't dig it out. It didn't hurt, really, until his mom tried digging it out with tweezers. The skin around the splinter puffed and sore. He asked Will, grudgingly, to take a look at it.

When Will healed the splinter, Lucas' skin swallowed the wood.

“I'm sorry!” Will said, eyes wide and panicked.

Lucas flexed his hand. It didn't hurt. He couldn't really feel it, except for...well, his hand felt a little heavier, like he could seriously tell the

weight difference a little splinter made.

“Hey, man, it's okay,” Lucas said.

The woods don't call to him. He doesn't find a sense of belonging under leafy canopies. The woods are.

Still, Lucas never got lost.

When Mike insisted they go help search for Will, Lucas agreed. He was certain he could find Will. Dark or rain, Lucas was going to find his friend.

It was with bitter disappointment, they found a girl instead.

The signs for his class kept emerging.

“You're not old enough to know what your class will be,” Mrs. Sinclair says. “Your affinity changes as you grow.”

Lucas doesn't tell her about how he knew Benny's Burgers was closed before it had been announced. Or that he knew an arcade would be opening soon. (If he did, the Sinclairs would have been able to check what Robert and Darla Collins were planning on doing with the storefront they just rented.) He just knew when Hawkins changed.

“You think it's your class?” Mike asked carefully.

Talking classes with Mike required caution. Whatever Mike would grow up to be, it was driving him crazy now. Lucas-- everyone-- thought they knew what Mike's class would be. Mike was supposed to be a Mage, but El and her absence was changing him.

“I almost feel like a Fighter, maybe,” Lucas said.

“Not like a Ranger?” Mike asked.

“Come on, man, no one's a Ranger anymore,” Lucas snorted.

The difference between a bow, crossbow, and a gun were many and varied. If a person was a talented sniper, it didn't necessarily mean they were a ranger. Even in the past, an outdoor loving marksman

could be a Fighter. Being a Ranger was deeper than that.

Rangers are rare. They don't pop up as much anymore. Why would they? Rangers were picked by the land to protect the people. With established governments, there was the military and police forces to keep the land safe from bad men.

"You don't think it's weird you wounded the Demogorgon with a slingshot," Mike asked flatly.

"It was a wrist rocket," Lucas mumbled back.

They save Hawkins again, and Lucas doesn't say how the wrist rocket felt good in his hands. How standing with his friends while baiting, hunting, and facing the demo-dogs made him...almost happy. Like he was doing what he was supposed to be doing.

"You're the best protector Hawkins has," Will said.

He stared deeply at Lucas, like he knew Lucas' future already. It's a little heady. Mike was *something*. Something miraculous already. Lucas felt like a better person just standing next to Mike. Dustin was a Bard. It was only a matter of time before he became a Master Bard. He'd probably get registered before any of them. El was a freaking *Mage*. Her destructive power made Lucas' knees weak. How could any of them stop her if the bad men turned her against them? And Will was special, a Cleric in training. He was already speaking in prophecy, and he had the power to-- well, Lucas wasn't sure if Will attracted or repelled the undead, but something was going on with Will and the Upside Down.

How was he, Lucas Sinclair, the best protector Hawkins had?

(He didn't need to ask about Max. Max was a Rogue. She would go where she liked, and she would do what she liked. Rogues needed the freedom to be who they were. Staying to protect Hawkins for her entire life wasn't in Max's personality.)

"Maybe that's exactly it," Max shrugged. "The others' personalities... They'd destroy Hawkins if it meant keeping the world safe from the Upside Down. But you get that Hawkins is part of the world. You'll

keep it safe, even from *them*.”

It felt too big to comprehend. Lucas remembered when him and Mike were Holly-tiny, and they were excitedly dreaming about the day they could confidently declare a class. Now, it was something Lucas dreaded. Because despite Mrs. Sinclair's assurances and Lucas' hopes, he knew.

He was a Ranger.

## 2. Rogue Max

“The world doesn't like people like us,” Mr. Mayfield would say. “They can't control us, and that scares them.”

Rogues have a bad reputation. Max knew this better than most. Her dad's family, for as long as anyone can remember, were Rogues. Max's class has been declared since she was two, and doors automatically unlocked at her touch.

Not that it was magic. Not really. Not like how Mages or Clerics or Bards use magic. It was more like Max remembered her ancestors learning how to open locks. It was weird, she'd be the first to admit it.

“A Rogue will do what needs to be done,” Mr. Mayfield explained grimly.

They've been spies, assassins, thieves, con artists, kidnappers. They've been criminals and outlaws. They've existed in the grey spaces in the world.

“The best thing to ever happen to us was the Wild West,” Grandpa Mayfield claimed.

Mr. Mayfield spent too much time in Nevada. He tried developing a system to count cards, and he would always insist *this* time, he had it right. Max's mom left Mr. Mayfield when he took out too many shark loans.

Not that Max understood this.

“You exist outside of society,” Mrs. Hargrove said, and her hands twitched.

Mrs. Hargrove never said what her class affinity was. She would meekly fold her hands in her lap with her dishwater blonde hair pinned neatly in a bun. She would always do that-- hold on to her hands.

The other classes spit on Rogues. Max doesn't think it's crazy to think

maybe, just maybe, her mom was a Rogue, too, but cloaked herself. Mr. Hargrove was a hard man, a Fighter through and through. A man like that would never associate with the the grey alignment.

“I didn’t agree to letting you in the party,” Mike said, once.

Max didn’t understand his anger at the time. His very being seemed to hate her when he didn’t even know her. She wanted him to like her so bad. If Mike liked and accepted her, then the other boys would follow. She’d have friends.

Except Mike recoiled from her.

“He’s not usually like that,” Lucas said. “He just--”

“He misses our friend,” Dustin finished. “Like a lot.”

It would be easy to believe Mike disliked her because he didn’t want her to replace his other friend. It even made sense. Max’s been the new kid before. It’s happened before.

But Mike always grimaced like being near her disgusted him.

And then she met Eleven the Mage.

Eleven and Mike’s reunion made Max stagger. Their magic *recognized* each other. Max could recognize pieces of magic coiled tightly in Mike the entire time was Eleven’s, and Eleven’s magic embraced Mike. Color and strength flooded Mike, and Max realized for the first time that Mike had looked like shit the whole time.

“...353 days,” Mike whispered.

“I heard,” Eleven whispered back.

“She’s not a Mage,” Max whispered numbly to herself. “She’s *not* a Mage.”

No one noticed. Eleven’s presence and magic distracted everyone. Max could feel the house becoming safe and warm, despite the evil trying to take one of their own.

“Hi, I’m Max,” Max introduced herself.

The other girl brushed her off. Didn’t even give her the time of day which sucked. Eleven wasn’t someone Max wanted to offend.

It made Mike’s dislike of her understandable, though.

He was a Paladin.

Paladins’ alignments were strict. They didn’t understand grey. Paladins were about justice and righteousness and good. They swore their oaths to their Deities-- greater, lesser, or demi-- and their Deity loaned them power and protected them.

“She’s not a Mage,” Max hissed to Lucas after--

Just after everything.

“What?” Lucas asked.

“Your friend! Eleven! She’s not a Mage!” Max repeated. “She’s a--”

“Shhh,” Dustin shushed quickly. “She doesn’t know, yet!”

“You knew?” Max snapped.

“Well, duh! Mike gave her his oath!”

“Wait, what?” Lucas demanded.

Dustin looked guilty. It felt impossible to forget Dustin was a Bard. He used the spoken word and songs to empower and guide them so effortlessly that it was easy to forget how powerful he must be to make it look easy. Dustin probably heard whoever it was the Bards listened to.

“Mike’s a Paladin. It’s not that surprising, right?” Dustin grinned weakly.

“Friends don’t lie,” Lucas repeated.

He almost sounded horrified. Good. Max didn’t want to be alone with the knowledge of what El was.



“El’s special,” Dustin pleaded with Lucas. “We always knew that. Nothing’s gotta change. Not until everyone’s ready, and Mike’s not ready.”

A Rogue belonged no where. Not unless she wanted to. Max vowed to do her best to balance El.

It would be in the other girl’s nature to try swaying and courting the other party members. She wouldn’t even know she was doing it. If Max stayed in the party, then the party would have the choice to be one of El’s or not. Max was a wild card. She could do this.

“Rogues can be tricksters,” Mr. Mayfield said when Max called him, terrified. “And tricksters can beat Deities if they’re clever enough.

“You’d be our first,” Mr. Mayfield finished, and he sounded proud of her.

Max closed her eyes, swallowed hard, and accepted her class and subclass: Rogue and Trickster.

### 3. Paladin Mike

“You don’t pick your class,” Ted Wheeler would say, then he would chuckle, and snap his newspaper. “Your class picks you.”

Not everyone was born to be an adventurer.

Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler liked the life modern conveniences afford them. Ted abandoned his adventurer aspirations at a young age, approximately when he met a young acolyte preparing to take her vows. Karen was lovely, well educated, and Ted fell in love with her quicker than he lost the desire to explore.

“I’m going to be a Mage,” Mike would say stubbornly.

He trained every day in the basement. Easy kid stuff. He was only a little kid. He knew better than to overdo it.

Nancy was always there to remind him, too. She wanted the same thing.

“You shouldn’t burn yourself out,” Nancy said in one breath and in the next, “The Unseen University is highly competitive. You have to be better than the best.”

(No Wheeler will become a mage.)

Nancy studied the paperback spell books with a diligence that made Karen proud. Mike could see the way his mom would beam at Nancy, like his sister was doing what his mom couldn’t. Sometimes, when his dad slept in the recliner, he wondered why his mom left Pelor’s Temple.

The basement was lined with Karen Wheeler’s old books. The book spines gently glowed gold with Pelor’s grace. Karen would pray for Pelor’s light and to protect their family. She loved the Deity.

Mike doesn’t understand how his mom could give up her vows for his dad. For them.

When Will’s disappearance turned the world upside down, and Mike

insisted their tiny, informal party go look for their wayward member in the woods—

When the rain poured down, and a chill settled in his bones and in the trees, and Mike could feel the fear settle in, too—

When a terrified girl with a shaved head looked Mike in the eyes—

Mike felt something settle:

“Don’t worry. No one’s going to hurt you. You’re safe.”

He said it like a promise, no, like an oath.

Mike swore an oath-promise to a strange girl in the woods, and Pelor recognized the oath and spun it in gold and light, so mote it be.

Sons of almost priestesses should be careful with their promises.

Not that he understood the gravity of the situation. He was only twelve. How would he be able to tell an oath from a promise?

But he doesn't accept Pelor's influence. Mike doesn't realize there was anything to accept. The oath-promise hung in limbo, only partially finished.

And then Mike dared to kiss El.

It was his first kiss.

(“What did you give the Deity?” Karen whispered anxiously, years later in the car after he was class tested and registered. “What did you sacrifice?”)

It felt like a big promise: Mike Wheeler would do anything in his power to keep Eleven safe and happy. She made his heart pound, his hands shaky, and his breathing fast. He liked her, and she deserved to have someone to protect her.

He wanted to be the one to do it.

It was a quick kiss, but the waves of pure *good* made Mike sigh. It

was like being wrapped in a warm robe after a hot bath and set in front of the TV, while *Star Wars* started and melty brownies disintegrated on his tongue. It felt like everything was perfect.

(Because that's how it feels when a Deity takes on a Paladin: divine happiness.)

When El was gone, his heart broke every day. It was like she was haunting him. Mike would swear he could feel her, and feeling her but not feeling her was enough to make him rage or cry.

And after she came back--

"I promise. I promise. I promise," Mike chanted and gave her a watery smile, and he accidentally, officially, declared fealty.

It was even marked by a sacrifice.

("How did you not know?" Nancy demanded after her intense ritual with the priestesses, priests, Mystics, and Clerics to declare fealty to Pelor.)

"Me too," El chanted right back, and she pressed her oaths and tears into Mike's neck.

("I didn't know she was a demigod! I thought she was a Mage!")

A demigod's tears were priceless.

It made them a little secular for awhile. Not that Mike or El understood what was going on, yet. They thought magic reinforced their promises like between two Mages.

Dustin, though...

("You knew I was a Paladin!" Mike confronted.)

*"And you say you belong to me and ease my mind, Imagine how the world could be, so very fine, So happy together,"* Dustin would sing playfully, with hooks of his magic (The Turtles).

("It was kind of obvious, dude," Dustin said.)

It made the bond between Mike and El a two way street. How was Mike to know he was a Paladin when his Bard friend was doing everything in his literal power to alter the traditional relationship a Deity and Paladin had? Dustin did his best to protect Mike.

(“You guys fell on love on your own, though,” Dustin said. “I had *nothing* to do with it.”)

*“Hell, with it baby cause you're fun and you're mine and you look so divine,”* El liked to sing along with Redbone because Chief Hopper hated new music.

She would sing with the song with a sparkle in her eye while she looked at Mike. And yeah. Dustin was right. Mike fell in love with her all by himself.

It didn't make him any less her Paladin .

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Unseen University is a Discworld wizarding school  
Happy Together by The Turtles  
Come and Get Your Love by Redbone

## 4. Bard Dustin

“The Deities spoke the world into existence. The primordial Words of Creation still echo in the cosmos. As bards, we borrow the Deities’ voices, and we make them our own,” Claudia Henderson taught her son.

Claudia’s listened to the Deities’ voices ever since she was a little girl. She never had to concentrate to hear the Words of Creation. It took more work to train her voice to sing.

She never entertained silly dreams of becoming a famous singer or actress. She was content to sing in her church choir, and she was happy to sing for her husband. It was her duty as a Bard to heal the world, one song at a time.

“Sweet joy I call thee,” Claudia sang. (Blake)

Her infant son was her entire world. He was only two days old, and she could already feel him trying to grab the magic in her voice. When he learned to talk, he was more trouble than when he learned to walk.

His favorite thing to ask was, “*Why?*”

Dustin would ask with his face inquisitive and serious. As he grew older, he learned to wrap “*Why?*” in enough charm to persuade even the coldest hearts and the strongest minds. Claudia thanked the Deities she raised her son right. She knew in her song of songs, he would never abuse his control over others’ free will.

His second favorite thing to ask was, “Why can’t I tell them?”

Clerics, the snobby ones, loved to boast about their foresight. Quite a few go into politics. Seeing the future, no matter how blurry, was a gift to covet. No one ever asked *how* a Bard knew what songs to sing. Claudia certainly didn’t have the money to earn a crockpot degree in Psychology.

“The nature of our gift means we know the secrets of the universe,”

Claudia always said. "It's not our place to blab them."

Dustin didn't really understand. Not until the Summer of '83. Whenever he went into the woods, pressure would build in his ears like they needed to pop until he felt like ripping his ears off. He knew now that he was hearing El and the Upside Down.

But he didn't then.

In the Fall of '83, Will's theme song changed. *Everyone's* theme songs did. Dustin thought he was going nuts. Even his mom frowned at the party when they'd come over because songs *don't just change because they feel like it*.

But Will's song changed the most. It started to sound a lot less like *Come on Eileen* and more *I Wanna Be Sedated*. It felt like a warning. A warning Dustin didn't understand at the time.

"I thought Bards heard the Cosmos. Not rock music," Mrs. Byers teased.

"We do! My mom says my brain translates it to something I understand better though because I'm so young. I guess her medium was poetry? But mine is songs off the radio," Dustin explained.

Mrs. Byers' theme song was *Gimme Shelter* by the Rolling Stones which was pretty badass for an adult. Mrs. Byers kind of had crazy eyes, so he thought it was fitting. And then Will disappeared and it was really fitting.

Mrs. Byers let nothing stop her from saving Will from the Upside Down.

"Fucking badass," Dustin admired.

Dustin knew when the party members' classes settled, because their songs did, too.

Lucas' theme song settled when they got Will back: *All Along the Watchtower*. His mom helped him figure out what it meant.

"He's a Ranger, honey," she said with surprise. "You should focus on

songs and words that connect him to the environment. It'll make him strong."

She didn't ask *why*. Dustin wondered what Words of Creation were telling her about him. If she knew what he was doing, because he didn't.

Mike was losing it. Literally. His theme song *Stand By Me* for the longest time and then it was replaced by drums and cymbals. Will was pretending he was okay, even when his theme song was really eerie. Really, Will? Lucas was the only sane one!

Max was the first kid Dustin's ever met with a permanent theme song. "Yeah, I'm a Rogue," Max said, and *Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap* repeats in Dustin's head over and over. Dustin liked her immediately.

Everyone thought El was a Mage. She had super cool powers like the ancient Mages. It didn't ring true, though.

Her song wasn't anything like Troy's.

"I don't get her," Dustin grumbled to his mom.

"Jane?" Claudia asked.

His mom looked thoughtful. She only met El a few times, and it was always with the party flanking her. The music around El was slow, a lot like Will's actually, but Dustin couldn't make out the words, yet. He couldn't figure out Will's new song either.

"*whatever a sun will always sing is you*," Claudia quoted slowly (Cummings). "Jane and Mike share the same poem. I'm surprised they don't share the same song."

And that--

"Holy shit," Dustin realized.

El knew her song! It was the same song as Mike! They were--

"Honey, whatever you're mixed up in, be careful," Claudia said softly. "Heroes suffer."



“But I’m so proud of you. Your Party-- you’ll do great things.”

Dustin's theme song was *The Joker*. After Dustin registered as a Bard before high school, he reserved the name Scooby Gang. They were going to need it.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Infant Joy by William Blake

Come On Eileen by Dexys Midnight Runners

I Wanna Be Sedated by Ramones

Gimme Shelter by The Rolling Stones

All Along the Watchtower by Jimi Hendrix

Stand By Me by Ben E. King

Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap by AC/DC

i carry your heart with me by e.e. cummings

The Joker by The Steve Miller Band

"Scooby Gang" references the great teen "parties" like the actually Scooby Gang and the Buffy Gang.

## 5. Cleric Will

“Be careful when you heal,” Joyce Byers said fretfully. “You give a little bit of yourself every time you cast.”

Joyce Byers would know.

Sweet sixteen, and Joyce ruled Hawkins High School with a lollipop in her mouth. The athletes would present her with gifts and ask for little gifts in turn. Soothe a pulled muscle. Mend a sprain. Heal a bruise.

Joyce Byers spent too much of her life healing Lonnie Byers, her then boyfriend, and her now ex-husband.

The beauty that made the flowers left by her locker hid itself with every spell she cast on Lonnie. The vibrancy that made her glow retreated deep into her heart, where only her children could see it. The vitality that marked Joyce Byers a healer diminished bit by bit, until all that was left was a tired woman, grimly waiting for the day her children found their calling.

“This young—you use your own life to heal, baby,” Joyce explained, over and over. “It’ll take years for a Deity to lend you their strength.”

Will never saw the harm in his healings. He did it for his informal party. He healed skid knees, black eyes, and stomped on hands. He loved his friends, and he never minded the dizziness and shortness of breath that occurred when he healed one of the party members.

It was the least he could do, especially when Dustin would croon gentle songs to make his power swell and flourish, or Lucas would push Will to stand behind him when Troy and James threatened him, or Mike would persist and insist Will was his friend.

“I don’t think you’re just a healer,” Dustin said, sometimes. “Your songs aren’t—” and then Dustin shrugged.

It took more than weeks in the Upside Down and the Demogorgon hunting for Will to become what’s he meant to be.

It took the Mind Flayer.

“You’re a Cleric,” Mike figured out. “Will! You can tell them to go away.”

A Cleric can repel or control the undead. The Upside Down whispered to Will. He could hear it when he closed his eyes and breathed in deep.

*“Stay with us. Love us. Come back.”*

The Upside Down doesn’t stay away. The bad men don’t stay away. Hawkins was plagued by them every other year. Sometimes, it felt like the Upside Down was getting closer and closer, the walls between Hawkins and the other realm getting thinner and thinner.

“Being a teenager is already hard enough,” Joyce smiled sadly. “It’s not fair this realm keeps asking you to save it.”

Dustin was the first of them to register: a Bard. (“We have to be registered if we want to be a Party!”) Max was next, even if it made her uncomfortable. (“Rogues don’t really-- you know. It’s weird,” Max said.) Hopper registered El as a Mage when she started high school. Lucas made headlines as the first registered Ranger in Hawkins. (“I still can’t believe it.”) Mrs. Wheeler insisted Mike be tested after Nancy was registered as one of Pelor’s Paladins. He was registered as a Paladin, too, with his Deity left faintly marked. (“My mom hasn’t stopped praying. She thinks something bad happened to me and Nancy, and that’s why we’re, you know, Paladins.”)

Will hasn’t registered.

Not yet.

Cleric fit like a bad alter ego.

Will lacked the righteousness that kept the Upside Down from swallowing Mike. He lacked Lucas’ ability to pick the healing herbs and brew life saving tinctures. He didn’t have an ounce of Dustin’s ability to spell the party confident. The only one Will felt kinship with was Max and her grey morality.

“It’s the closest fit, right?” Jonathan asked. “You can always change it later.”

Will doesn’t know if he wants to repel, banish the creatures, or if he wants to turn the monsters against the Mind Flayer to make them his army. The good and the bad inside were constantly fighting to win. The Upside Down wanted him, and Will was finding it hard to say no.

A Cleric wouldn’t be tempted.

Will met Dustin’s eyes, and he knew. Cleric wasn’t the word for what Will was. Maybe in another life, he could have been recognized as a Cleric. The party would register and be formally recognized, and they’d go adventuring. Will saw it, plagued by foresight when he was trapped in the Upside Down. Will would use his skills and talents to heal, inspire, and keep the party safe, and that’s all that would happen.

But now?

“We need to kill the Deity. The Mind Flayer,” Eleven said, her eyes piercing, looking into Will.

“I know you’re, um, special,” Max said, and Will doesn’t look away from El’s gaze. “But one demigod isn’t enough to kill a Deity. Are you crazy?”

“You’re a Rogue, aren’t you?” Mike demanded. “Isn’t your whole thing based on luck?”

“Hey, fuck you, White Knight--”

“No. But *two* demigods have a chance,” Will corrected.

“Oh boy, looks like we’re finally talking about this, okay, here we go,” Dustin mumbled.

Because Will was a Cleric returned as a demigod.

## 6. Mage Eleven

“Your mom was a Mage,” Aunt Becky said. “She was attending the Unseen University when she told me about you.”

El nodded and pretended to understand what the woman meant. Her aunt didn't *feel* like anything. She was static. Quiet.

Joyce Byers didn't have a class, and she felt like *something*. Energetic and loud with dynamic heartbeat.

“Some people are different,” Hopper explained. “Joyce-- she could have registered as a Cleric, but she didn't. You go too long or don't want it enough...”

“Registering as a class is bureaucratic bullshit now, anyways.”

Maybe Papa was a Mage, too.

“What's a Mage feel like?” El asked Hopper with a head tilt.

“Jeez, kid, you really don't know, do you?” Hopper sighed.

He rubbed his face, looked at her, and then sighed, again. The white hairs by his ears and beard were spreading like snow in a blizzard. Hopper looked more and more tired.

“Know what?” El said.

“About Mages.”

“Mike told me,” El said, affronted.

El never heard the word Mage before Mike.

Papa never used the word before. No one ever said anything about classes or Deities or the world. El didn't *need* to know.

“A Mage has unbelievable magic stats, like you, and they're super smart. My sister's studying to be one, and said Mages aren't actually smarter, their brains are just different. I've been studying, too, but--”

and on and on.

He told her *a lot* about Mages.

Mike liked talking about Mages. He was hoping to register as a Mage. “When we grow up, we’re going to register as a Party and defeat bad guys and complete quests and stuff.”

Mike even taught her his favorite spell: Creation.

Mike cupped his hands together. A glowing, hot ball like the sun rested in his hands. It was pretty.

“It’s a sun! My mom taught me.”

When they were separated, and El could only see him in the Void, she would make a dozen tiny suns to spin around Mike’s head. She saw it in a movie, *Excalibur*. She liked seeing the suns orbit Mike’s head. It made him smile weakly, sometimes, almost like he could sense it.

“A Mage feels like a smaller version of you,” Hopper said.

This El has experience with:

“Her stats are off the charts,” Papa said, aside to an assistant, like she couldn’t hear or understand him. “Create a new chart.”

“You have a lot of magic, like, a lot,” Mike said.

El didn’t know enough about the world to know if she was a Mage, but the rest of the world did. Everyone called her girl, teenager, and Mage. It must be what she was.

She never needed to study the books Hopper brought home. The spells were there when she reached for them. She didn’t need to know the words. The magic was always there and it wanted her to use it.

“You’re special,” Papa used to tell her when she made him proud.

Maybe Special was her class?

El was...Special. Mike kissed her, and she took his magic. She could feel it in the second his lips touched her. She didn't mean to.

It felt a lot like lying about the compass, so she gave him some of her power.

El doesn't think Mages *share* magic.

It was mostly Mike that made Mage fit El wrong. She could always feel him. Even when they were across town from each other, she could feel him. It hurt her to be so far from him. He *needed* her, and she needed him.

He *believed* in her.

And then when she came back, and they were allowed to see each other, El could feel Mike touch her magic. He never used it. El doesn't think he knew he could. He just liked feeling her magic all the time, and she'd be lying if she said she hated it.

Mike felt like hers, and no one could take him away. She would kill anyone who tried. He was *hers* .

"He's yours!" Max agreed anxiously before they started being friends. "Your Paladin. And you're his. Whatever you really are."

El liked that. Her Paladin. Whatever that meant.

Mage didn't fit El right. It was like wearing Hopper's or Mike's clothes. Mage was too small for how she could hear the Words of Creation as songs if she really, really listened, and the way her magic welcomed Mike.

"Eleven..." Hopper looked at her very seriously. "You might have an affinity for Mage, but you won't settle one.

"You're a demigod, and like hell we're register you as one of those."

A demigod was traditionally created three ways: a Deity lost their godhood, a Deity procreated with a human, or a human survived and their humanity was changed.

But El?

“Hawkins Lab was trying to figure out how to make a bunch of demigod soldiers. And kid, looking at you, I think they succeeded.”

Mrs. Henderson trained Dustin. “That’s how Bards traditionally do it,” Dustin explained with a grin. Max didn’t need formal training. “It’s in our blood,” she shrugged. The Sinclairs spent a lot of money on rare books for Lucas to read. “Being a Ranger is too rare. There’s no one to teach me,” Lucas said. Nancy taught Mike. “We might be sworn to different Deities, but we’re both Wheelers and Paladins,” Mike said, blushing. Ms. Byers showed Will how to heal, but like El, the rest Will had to find out on his own. “I think the Mind Flayer wants to be my master,” Will admitted to her. “I think I’m-- A little like you.”

“A lot like me,” El confirmed.

Will felt like her. Too big to be a Cleric. The Upside Down took him and changed him. The Mind Flayer *lived* inside Will and changed him. He was a demigod the right way.

“We will kill the Mind Flayer, when we’re stronger. Us and the Party,” El said.

“Yeah,” Will smiled quietly. “We will.”

They were demigods. They could do anything.